

Best Apartment Search Tools

A combination of posts from the LifeHacker Blog



Gone are the days when the only place to find apartment listings was the back of a newspaper. Now you can conduct apartment searches of all sorts online, and its almost always packed with additional photos, video, and information.

HotPads



HotPads approaches apartment search in a novel way. In addition to offering the basic city/price searches found in any apartment search engine, HotPads has heat maps. When you search for apartments with HotPads, you can overlay heat maps of various data onto the map like population density, household income, median age, median rent, and foreclosure data. The heat maps give you a view of your future neighborhood that a simple apartment listing can't. In addition to the heat maps, each listing has a breakdown of how the price of the listing you're looking at compares to others in the zip code, city, county, and state. You can search HotPads for apartments as well as use it to search for a room to sublet or a roommate to sublet a room from you. www.hotpads.com/

Craigslist is your best friend

If you're lucky enough to live in one of the ever-growing number of cities with an active Craigslist, this should be your first stop for apartment-hunting. www.craigslist.net/

[los angeles craigslist](#) > [housing](#)



A screenshot of the Craigslist search interface for Los Angeles housing. The form includes a 'keywords' field with 'elm' entered, a dropdown menu set to 'apartments for rent', and a 'Search' button. Below this, there are input fields for 'rent' with values '600' and '1200', a dropdown for '1 BR', and checkboxes for 'cats' and 'dogs' which are both checked.

Since Craigslist allows you to subscribe to search-based RSS feeds, you can very easily and quickly set up a number of searches that you can track via your favorite RSS reader (I used Bloglines).

To set up a search-based feed, go to your friendly neighborhood Craigslist and click on "Housing." Then enter your search term(s), rent limits, number of bedrooms, and whether you're looking for a pet friendly place. After you've entered all your criteria and hit Enter, go to the bottom of the page and copy the link from the "RSS" text at bottom of the page. Then just add the link to your feed reader.

- 
- A screenshot of a folder named 'Apartment Search 2006' containing 20 sub-folders. The sub-folders are listed with their respective counts in parentheses: Franklin (4), Alexandria (3), Kenmore (3), Ambrose (2), Mariposa (2), Prospect (2), Avocado (1), Berendo (1), Hobart (1), Vermont Village (1), Barnsdall, and Catalina St.

When you're setting up your Craigslist feeds, don't be stingy on the number of feed subscriptions. For my apartment hunt, for example, I was tracking over 20 different feeds in my apartment search folder. If you know where you want to live, go nuts - create a separate feed for every neighborhood name, nickname, and street name in your search area.

You may end up with a few irrelevant results if the street runs well outside of your search area, but those are easy to weed through, and it's better that you have a couple of extras than miss that one perfect listing. After all, the more terms you flag, the more likely you'll find that one apartment that may have slipped under the radar of your competition (okay, so it's not a competition, per se... but who hasn't felt the someone-might-snap-this-great-apartment-before-I-do anxiety?).

If you'd prefer not having 20-plus different feeds in your reader, you can aggregate the whole bunch of them with previously-mentioned RSS aggregator FeedBlendr.

Mobile apartment hunting

One of the great things about Bloglines is that you can check your feeds on-the-go from your mobile device. That means that while you're out and about checking out open houses and meeting with apartment managers, you can also keep an eye on new listings. Since my girlfriend and I could only check out apartments on the weekend, this meant that if a new listing showed up on Craigslist, I could read about it from my phone, call the number, and set up an appointment for the same day. After all, the quicker you call, the better your chances, right?

PadMapper / Craigslist



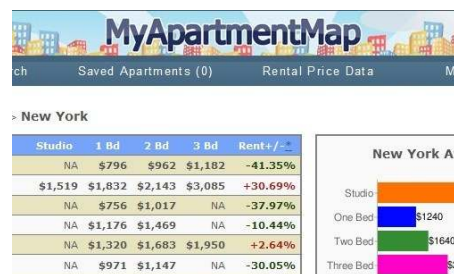
Craigslist is a popular destination among Lifehacker readers searching for apartment listings, but it isn't the most feature packed apartment listing tool. Fortunately PadMapper takes the spartan listings on Craigslist and aggregates them into a Google Maps mashup. You can search PadMapper just like you would Google Maps, and every pushpin in the map is an apartment listing. PadMapper results can be filtered by price, bedrooms, bathrooms, and pets. If you're already using Craigslist to do your apartment searching, PadMapper will put an extra zing to your search. www.padmapper.com/

Apartments.com



Apartments.com is a veteran of the apartment search field. Their color-coded neighborhood maps will jog a few memories even if you haven't been apartment searching for some time. They don't have the flashiest site in the market, but thanks to being one of the original players in the online apartment-search field, they've got an absolutely enormous pool of listings. Nearly every listing has a photo tour and a significant number of them have 360° virtual tours. The color-coded maps are quite useful if you're unfamiliar with the layout of the city you're browsing in and help you quickly drill down from region to individual neighborhood. Apartments.com also has an iPhone app which combines the listings at Apartments.com with the GPS chip in the iPhone to create a location-aware apartment search tool. Love the neighborhood you're driving through? Hit a button in the iPhone app and see if anything is available. www.apartments.com/

MyApartmentMap



MyApartmentMap has quite a slew of features beyond simply indexing apartment listings. You can jump to Google Streetview to check out your new neighborhood, browse an interactive map of local businesses and social spots, and get rental data for your new city and neighborhood to compare the prices of the apartments you're looking at to the city averages—a rather handy feature if you're moving to a city with a market you're unfamiliar with. You can also search by colleges to see listings for off-campus housing surrounding that college in addition to searching by city and neighborhood. If you don't find anything you like, you can set up email and RSS alerts to be notified when listings that fit your requirements appear. MyApartmentMap pulls listings from Craigslist (like PadMapper) as well as a variety of other online resources. www.myapartmentmap.com.



Just-hatched apartment search engine MyNewPlace offers a database of over 6 million apartment rentals for those of you on the hunt for new digs.

Positioned to compete with Craigslist, users can post comments on apartments and the locations are displayed on a Google Map. Apartment owners pay a fee to post on MyNewPlace, and users get a \$150 rebate for signing a rental agreement after using the site. My initial searches turned around decent (but not stellar) results in San Diego as well as NYC - but you have to register to see details on an apartment result. (Lame, MyNewPlace.) Filter your search by a whole bunch of criteria as well, like number of bedrooms, pets policy, rent range and amenities like exercise facilities and a pool. www.mynewplace.com/

Pounding the Pavement



While the internet can be helpful in bringing apartment listings straight to you, it requires that someone actually makes the effort to list the apartment, which won't always be the case. If you've got the time, energy, and desire to live in a particular neighborhood, one of the most effective methods for finding a great place is taking it to the streets.

Get in your car, drive to the neighborhood where you'd like to live, and walk around, keeping your thirsty eyes open for those orange, black and white "For Rent" signs. Chances are you will find one or two places that you haven't seen listed anywhere else (after all, if the neighborhood really is *so* great, the renters will come to them). If you find one, call it.



First Stop During Hard Times Mountain View Public Library